

Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Policy: Bury St Edmunds Town Council

This policy document seeks to inform those who may wish to register compliments, make suggestions and register complaints about to Bury St Edmunds Town Council. It aims to be consistent with the Council's aims to ensure the best possible service delivery from its Councillors and staff.

Statement of intent:

Bury St Edmunds Town Council aims to provide the best possible level of service delivery in a manner that is fair, efficient and effective. This applies to our service to users and amongst its Councillors and staff. Opportunities will be taken to use compliments, suggestions and complaints to assess, improve and develop the Council's services.

How policy will be applied:

Bury St Edmunds Town Council will:

- Be active in the receipt and recording of compliments, suggestions and complaints and adhere to procedures and timescales
 - Ensure that Councillors and staff have knowledge and understanding of procedures surrounding compliments, suggestions and complaints
 - Use compliments, suggestions and complaints to assess, examine and improve service delivery
 - Attempt the early and satisfactory resolution of complaints
 - Invoke formal complaints procedures as and when necessary
- Publish in anonymised format occasions where compliments, suggestions and complaints have led to change or improvement in services

How policy will be reviewed:

Full Council will have responsibility for the review and update, as appropriate and at least annually, of this policy and its effectiveness.

Compliments, suggestions and complaints: Procedures

1 Methods by which to compliment Bury St Edmunds Town Council:

Please let any of the Town Councillors or members of staff know (by telephone, letter or e-mail) providing the following:

- Name, address, contact details (telephone, e-mail)
- The nature of the compliment – what was it that was good?
- The names of those who provided the good service
- Whether you are willing for your name to be attributed to any comments used by the Council to show recognition of its services

2 Method by which to make a suggestion to improve the services of Bury St Edmunds Town Council

Please let any of the Town Councillors or members of staff know (by telephone, letter or e-mail) providing the following:

- Name, address, contact details (telephone, e-mail)
- The nature of the suggestion, including any likely cost (if known)
- Who you have contacted about your suggestion (if so, please indicate who and when)
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3 If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the procedure below:

3.1 Before making a formal complaint

Sometimes, in the course of service delivery there is misunderstanding or a mistake made. We aim to resolve complaints at the lowest level possible. We suggest that you try, in the first instance, to speak to the person to whom you are directing your complaint. If this does not address the issue then you may wish to make a formal complaint but **first, please determine to whom it should be made:**

(a) If you are alleging financial irregularity:

You may wish to complain to the Town Council or direct to the police authorities

(b) If you are alleging criminal activity:

You may wish to report the matter direct to the police authorities

(c) If your complaint is about decisions, action or lack of action of the Town Council:

You may wish to make your complaint to the Town Council.

(d) If your complaint concerns the conduct of a Member of the Town Council:

Members are bound to observe The Suffolk Local Code of Conduct and to accord with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Localism Act 2011. Where it is alleged in writing that a Member or co-opted Member (or former Member or former co-opted Member) of the Town Council has failed to comply with the code of conduct, the West Suffolk Monitoring Officer has powers conferred to carry out investigations. Furthermore, the West Suffolk Standards Committees can make decisions about allegations and are able to impose sanctions. For more information about this process, contact the West Suffolk Monitoring Officer.

(e) If your complaint concerns a member of staff of the Town Council:

You may wish to initially contact the Town Clerk or Chairman of the Town Council, or to formally register your complaint in writing through them. Action will then be taken in line with Town Council internal disciplinary procedures.

3.2 How to make a formal complaint

(a) Making a formal complaint to the Town Clerk or any Town Councillor

If you are making your complaint in writing (letter or e-mail) to the Town Clerk or any Town Councillor please set out the following:

- Your name, address, contact details (telephone, e-mail)
- The nature of your complaint and names of people allegedly involved
- Whether you have already contacted anyone about the complaint (if so, please indicate who and when)
- What outcome you are seeking (for example putting the matter right; providing an explanation or apology; desiring compensation)

All personal information will be treated in strictest confidence.

If you are unable to communicate in writing you may wish to ask someone to help you make your complaint. If you would rather not discuss the matter with the Town Clerk, then please make contact with any of the Town Councillors shown on the Town Council website.

On receipt of your complaint you will be sent an acknowledgement within three working days showing how it is proposed to deal with your complaint, the extent to which an investigation will be necessary and the anticipated date of providing you with a result.

We aim to conclude complaints investigations within 20 working days but will keep you updated on progress.

(b) Making a formal complaint to the Monitoring Officer of the Standards Committee

If you want to make a complaint about the conduct of a Town Councillor, you must write to the Monitoring Officer of the Standards Committee of the District Council that collects your council tax (in this instance The Standards Committee Monitoring Officer, West Suffolk Council, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 3YU).

A Standards Committee is a group of people appointed by an Authority to help maintain and promote high ethical standards in public office. Standards Committees comprise at least 25% independent members and details regarding their composition and procedures can be found on www.standardsboard.gov.uk

The Standards Committee can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Member of the Council and will not deal with complaints about matters not covered by the members' Code of Conduct. If you make a complaint to the Standards Committee it must be in writing. You should say who it is about and why you think they have not followed the Code of Conduct.

Standards committees will not look at complaints that are about:

- People employed by the Town Council
- Incidents that happened before a Member was elected or chosen to serve
- Incidents that happened either before the Council adopted the Code of Conduct
- The way the Town Council conducts or records its meetings
- The way the Town Council has or has not done something. This may be a matter for the Local Government Ombudsman if the authority has not dealt with the matter properly and it has not been resolved locally

- Decisions of the Town Council

3.3 How your complaint will be handled

(a) If it is handled by the Police or other external authority

If your complaint has been made to the Police or other external authority, the Council will be guided by the process and progress of that investigation and will not actively intervene unless requested to do so or until such time as a decision has been made upon which the Council can consider action to be taken.

(b) If it is handled by the Town Council

If your complaint has been made orally or in writing to the Town Council, the matter will be referred to the next Full Council meeting of the Town Council. If the circumstances are such that the matter requires referral to the District Monitoring Officer, the Council will ensure that sufficient information is supplied to enable further investigation.

Where the Council deals with your complaint, it will determine whether the complaint should be considered in public or closed session. You will be invited to attend the public session of the Town Council meeting and you may be accompanied by a friend if you wish. This will enable you to have any procedural points explained and for Members to clarify any issues. Your grounds for complaint will be outlined either from any existing documentation or you (or your representative) will be invited to explain the nature of your complaint. The Chairman, Members and/or the Clerk may wish to question you regarding your account.

The Clerk (or other nominated officer) will have an opportunity to explain the Council's position and you (or your representative) and Members will be invited to put questions to the Clerk.

You (or your representative) and the Clerk (or other nominated officer) will then be invited by the Chairman to summarise matters regarding the complaint. Members will then consider the matter in private, during which all other people will be required to leave the room and be out of earshot. If a point of clarification is necessary, *both* parties shall be invited back.

Council will determine the outcome of the complaint as either:

- Substantiated, or
- Not substantiated

The Council may defer the announcement of its decision but will inform you in writing of the decision and intended outcome within seven working days of the hearing.

(c) If it is handled by the District Monitoring Officer of the Standards Committee

If your written complaint is sent to or referred to the District Monitoring Officer you will be told in writing what will happen to it.

If you are not satisfied by the way your complaint is handled

If you are dissatisfied with the decision made by the Council you should, within 20 working days of the date of the decision being sent to you, notify the Town Council in writing of the grounds of your dissatisfaction. An acknowledgement will be sent to you. The matter will be further considered at the next meeting of Town Council and it may be decided to convene a panel (which may include people independent of the Council) to review the decision and take account of any new information. You will be advised of their final decision within seven working days of Council's decision.

The role of the Local Government Ombudsmen

Although the Local Government Ombudsmen can look at complaints about services delivered by some councils, they do not have jurisdiction over complaints made against a Town Council. However, if you wish to contact their Advice Team you can do so on 0300 061 0614 or by viewing www.lgo.org.uk

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